

FATHER FABER

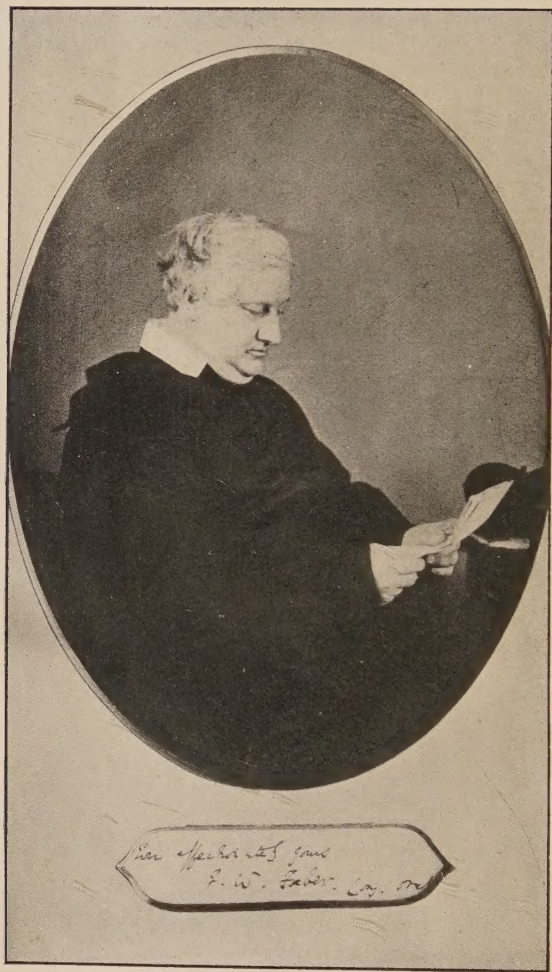


BY W. HALL-PATCH



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/bwb_W9-DFD-816



The Founder of The London Oratory

FATHER FABER

By W. HALL-PATCH

Verger at the London Oratory

With a Foreword by

His Eminence

CARDINAL BOURNE

P. J. KENEDY & SONS

44 BARCLAY STREET
NEW YORK

1914

GARMELITE MONASTERY
GUNHILL ROAD, BRONX, N.Y.

D
F

FATHER FABER

THE NEW YORK

LIBRARY

YREICANOM EIMEMRAS
Y. D. AMOND, OACH EIMEMRAS

FOREWORD

THE name of Father Faber is a household word among Catholics in England, and his hymns and other writings are in grateful remembrance wherever Catholics use the English tongue. But those still left who knew him personally are now very few ; the Life written soon after his death is not easily found, and the details of his interesting career and edifying life are in danger of being forgotten. For this reason we heartily welcome this account of the first Superior of the London Oratory, which owes so much of its ever fruitful work to his inspiration and the traditions that he established. We beg God's blessing and reward for the compiler.

FRANCIS CARDINAL BOURNE,
Archbishop of Westminster.

February 4th, 1914.

ALL that the author desires in this little Life of Father Faber is to supply a demand to which he, in his position, has repeatedly had his attention drawn, viz., a small cheap book telling something about Father Faber.

Most grateful thanks are offered to Father Sebastian Bowden and to Father K. D. Best for their kindly advice, and the permission of the latter to use his poem on "Faber's Grave." And also to Father Ralph Kerr for permission to reproduce the pictures for the illustrations.

September 1913.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Father Faber	<i>Frontispiece</i>
Facsimile of the MS. of Father Faber's most popular Hymn	<i>Facing page</i> 29
The First London Oratory, King William St., 1849-1853	39
A Ragged Congregation	42
The Old Oratory at Brompton	45
The New London Oratory	50
Father Faber's Grave	55

I

FREDERICK WILLIAM FABER was born on June 28, 1814, the man who, under God, was destined to do more for the revival of the Catholic Faith in England than any other during the short period of his life in the Church. His grandfather was incumbent of Calverley, and at the vicarage there Frederick William Faber first saw the light. He was not baptized at the church at Calverley, as might have been expected but was taken to the church of St. Wilfrid, whose name he afterwards took and to whom he appealed: "Make us the missionaries of Mary and of Rome."

As a child, "the child of his mother's prayers," he was a great favourite, and is described as "of an open disposition," ardent and impulsive, eager and determined, generally looking on any undertaking which he had in hand as being of the greatest importance.

FATHER FABER

His parents' Calvinistic views of necessity influenced the mind of the child, and we find them expressed from time to time in his earlier years at Oxford.

At the age of 11 years he had been sent to Shrewsbury School, afterwards going to Harrow, where he remained till his matriculation at Oxford (Balliol) in 1832, going into residence in 1833. The description given of him at this time reads like a page from the life of his beloved father St. Philip: "Of prepossessing appearance, with great conversational gifts, a general favourite, and leading a life full of joy, innocence and purity," which description may well be used for the whole of his life.

His father died the year of his going to Oxford, his mother died four years before.

Indeed, the life of Faber can almost be learned from his poems and hymns, which often read like a diary. "I worship Thee, Sweet Will of God" was the refrain which ran through the whole of his short but busy life. His poetical

FATHER FABER

instincts early showed themselves. The impressions of his childhood and the beauty of the scenes in which his early years were passed never faded from his mind :

“ How wonderful Creation is !
The work that Thou didst bless ;
And, O what then must Thou be like,
Eternal loveliness.”

Oxford, too, made its deep impression on him. The Rev. John Henry Newman was then vicar of St. Mary's. Faber soon became what he called “ an acolyth ” to the man who was destined to be his Superior in the Congregation of St. Philip. In the year 1833 began the great Movement known as the “ Tractarian,” for the revival of High Church principles ; and Faber's correspondence shows the effect it had on him. On the first day of 1834 we find him writing : “ Transubstantiation has been bothering me, not that I lean to it ; but I have seen no refutation of it.” But still the early influences prevailed. He feared that the

FATHER FABER

Tractarian Party would be led on to extremes, and almost resolved to return to the Evangelical tenets he formerly held. In a letter to J. B. Morris, he says : “ I am now never happy unless I am thinking, talking and writing respecting things eternal ”—“ yet I have had none of those miraculous heart awakenings, none of those *visible* interferences of the Spirit to pluck me as a brand from the burning. However, I suppose the power of religion acts in ten thousand different ways, and by ten thousand various instruments, according to the constitutions and temperaments of those over whom its agency is to be exercised. Nevertheless, I must likewise confess that when I look for the fruits of my faith, I cannot find any.”

From now he is continually quoting Newman, at first to criticise him : “ In arranging my thoughts for my Church Article, I have been thinking a great deal on the merits and tendency of Newmanism and I have become more than ever

convinced of its falsehood. . . . Am I chimerical in anticipating quite as much danger from the mysticisms of Newman as from the rationalities of Whateley ? I can most sincerely say, that after having been an unprejudiced acolyth of Newman's, an attentive reader of his works, and a diligent attender at his Church, I found the impressive simplicities of the Bible irksome to me : all its great consolations were knocked away from under me, and vague bodiless Platonic reveries were the food my soul craved for. Observe I *know* that this is not the case with Newman himself. I believe him to be an eminently pious, humble-minded Christian, but I think that he has sat at the feet of the early contemplative philosophers with an unscriptural humility and that he has imbibed their notions. Of course it would be preposterous in me to charge upon Newman what was probably in a great measure my own fault ; but still I think I may argue that the tendency of his system is bad."

FATHER FABER

In the beginning of 1835 he went into residence at University College, having been elected Scholar in the autumn, and although he set himself to work hard at his classics, felt very dubious as to the probability of taking honours. He became a member of the Union debating society, and spoke often, gaining a place in the front rank with men like Tait (afterwards Archbishop), "Ideal" Ward and Sir Roundell Palmer (afterwards Lord Chancellor). He also wrote magazine articles and verses and competed for the Newdigate prize poem in 1835, the subject being "The Knights of St. John." Owing to illness he was unable to sit for his Degree examination as he had intended; in Easter Term, 1835, having withdrawn he "went down" for a short time, and, during his absence heard that his poem had gained the coveted prize, and that of the thirty-seven poems sent in, none came into any close rivalry with the winner. The recitation took place on June 15th, 1836.

FATHER FABER

“ Holiest of Knighthood’s gallant sons
 were ye,
A sainted band, the Knights of Charity !
’Twas not an earthly guerdon that
 could move
Your gentle Brotherhood to acts of
 love.”

II

A great change occurred in Faber's religious life in the spring of 1836. The reaction caused by the fear of the effects of the Tractarian Party wore off, and he became a close follower of Newman, and a strong adherent of Anglican principles, in opposition to the claim of the Catholic Church, though we find him, all the same, quoting Dr. Wiseman from time to time. In a letter he writes at this time : " I have just come from a magnificent lecture (by Newman against the Church of Rome) on St. Peter's prerogative. He admits the text in its full literal completeness, and shows that it makes not one iota for the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome."

For some four or five years the whole atmosphere of England had been full of " Reform," not only of the constitution, but of Law and the Church, and a general attack was expected on the English Establishment. One party held that she

FATHER FABER

was a political body under the discipline of the State, and the other that she was the successor of the Church of the Apostles. In such a state of chaos, earnest-minded men were searching diligently for more light, amongst them Newman and—on the opposing side—Arnold, whose system was what J. S. Mill called “shilly-shally and inconsistent.” He viewed the Church as an essentially Protestant establishment. The followers of Newman regarded her as part of the Church Catholic. No wonder Newman wrote “Lead kindly light” since he found himself in such a world of mist and gloom.

Faber’s introduction to Newman was brought about by the share he took in the translation of the works of St. Optatus. Henceforth their names were to be constantly associated. On August 6th, 1837, Faber received Deacon’s orders at St. Wilfrid’s Cathedral at Ripon, and at once started as an assistant at Ambleside, remaining till his return

FATHER FABER

to Oxford at the end of "the long." On May 26th, 1839 he was ordained by the Anglican Bishop Bagot. Soon he published some tracts on Church matters which had a large circulation, and his preaching began to attract attention. He still hung back from a too close connection with the "Tractarians" but followed closely all that Newman wrote and said. "I think you will be delighted with Newman's lectures," he writes on March 31. "It supplied me with what I had long wanted—clear and positive statements of Anglican principles."

At Cologne, in the autumn of 1839, he and a friend who was with him attended the Divine Office almost daily. "We both of us got Mechlin Breviaries at Mechlin," he says, and he had prevailed upon a priest whose acquaintance he had made to "tutorise him in the Breviary."

His life was now an extremely busy one; his parochial work was rewarded by the Church-attendance

FATHER FABER

being more than doubled. He also published a small collection of poems. Towards the end of the year 1840 it was rumoured that he was about to marry, and he writes to his old friend, the Rev. J. B. Morris : “ With regard to marriage, as one does not like foolish reports to go about, I may as well say that I have no prospect of it, however remote ; and neither have nor have had, any engagement,” adding that he honoured celibacy so highly, and regarded it “ so eminently the fittest way of life for a Priest, that if Christ would graciously enable me to learn to live alone, I should prefer much, even with great self-denials to live a virgin life, and to die a virgin as God has kept me hitherto.”

The year 1841 was passed in travelling, and he was much struck in Dresden by the “ Lutheran Sunday.” After attending Mass, he went through the town, and declared that he had never in any Roman Catholic capital seen Sunday so “ fearfully profaned.” “ I never saw a more

FATHER FABER

profane scene. No person who has not been abroad and heard and seen and investigated for himself, would credit the extensive system of lying pursued by English travel-writers, tract compilers and Exeter Hall speechmakers, respecting the Roman Catholic abroad. These dull seekers scrape the sewers of England to roughcast the Church of Rome with their plentiful defilements."

III

We now enter upon what may be called the last phase of Faber's life as a Protestant. In the autumn of 1842 he was offered the Rectorship of Elton, and from then till November 1845 his life was one long struggle, ending in his reception into the "Fold of Peter" by Bishop Waring. It was on his telling Wordsworth of his intention of going to Elton that he replied, "I do not say you are wrong, but England loses a Poet."

He determined, however, before taking up his duties, to go once more through some of the Catholic countries and look more closely into the methods adopted by the Church in matters appertaining to the cure of souls. Having obtained letters of introduction from Dr. Wiseman and Cardinal Acton, he started off in the early spring, stopping first at Rouen, Eastering in Bordeaux, and after a stay in Marseilles, reaching Rome on May 9th. "By moonlight I have prayed

FATHER FABER

at the Tomb of the Apostles, almost alone in the metropolitan church of the whole world."

His diary and letters of this time reveal his drawings to Catholicity. Dr. Baggs, who was Rector of the English College, soon put him in the way of seeing the workings of the various organs of charity and religion in Rome. Referring to a visit to the room in which St. Philip used to say Mass at the Chiesa Nuova, he afterwards wrote : " How little did I, a Protestant stranger in that room years ago, dream that I should ever be of the Saint's family, or that the Oratorian Father who showed it to me should in a few years be appointed by the Pope the novice master of the English Oratorians."

On June 17th an audience of the Holy Father is thus described : " On entering I knelt down, and again when a few yards from him, and lastly before him ; he held out his hand, but I kissed his foot. He spoke of Dr. Pusey's suspension for

FATHER FABER

defending the Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist, with amazement and disgust ; he said to me, ‘ You must not mislead yourself in wishing for unity, yet waiting for your *Church* to move ; think of the salvation of your own soul.’ . . . He laid his hands on my shoulders and I immediately knelt down ; upon which he laid them upon my head, and said, ‘ May the Grace of God correspond to your good wishes, and deliver you from the nets of Anglicanism, and bring you to the true Holy Church.’ I left him almost in tears . . . I shall remember St. Alban’s Day, 1843, to my life’s end.”

IV

From this time Faber was practically convinced of the truth of the Church's claim, and he was only kept in the Anglican Church by what he called "the fear of self-will." A friend persuaded him into wearing a miraculous medal, which he kept as a souvenir of this eventful journey. His remaining in the Church of England was clearly due more to the feelings for his friends, and the influence of Newman and others to whom he looked as his leaders.

After the publication of "Tract 90," and its subsequent censure, a letter was sent to the *Univers*, dated from Oxford, and describing the tendencies of the followers of Newman. This letter, which was the joint work of Dalgairns and Ward caused great excitement, and some correspondence ensued. The conversion of Sibthorp closely followed, and caused a great deal of comment among his

FATHER FABER

fellows. Newman, told by Sibthorp that he was going to visit Oscott, enjoined : " Take care they do not keep you there," and afterwards often warned his friends of monkeys who had lost their tails and wished all the rest to lose theirs. The leader mistrusted what he considered undue haste in his followers. At Littlemore, where Lockhart expressed doubts of the claim of the Church of England, he replied, " You must agree to stay three years or go at once." This undoubtedly influenced Faber.

On his return from the tour already mentioned, he spoke of being "very, very, very Roman." He at once set to work at his church at Elton, determined to banish all his doubts, and modelled the work of his parish on what he called the spirit of St. Philip and St. Alphonsus. The result was that the dissenting chapel close to the Church became almost empty, young men began to communicate frequently, even " Confessions " were heard, and exercises on the lines of those of the

FATHER FABER

“ Little Oratory ” were established on Friday nights. Then, in 1845, came the conversion of Newman himself, and many of Faber’s friends; and we find him writing to the Catholic Bishop Waring, asking him how much of abjuration would be involved in an Anglican’s reconciliation with the Roman Church. His “ Life of St. Wilfrid ” had caused the greatest irritation, owing to the liberality with which the Catholic spirit was expressed.

The time was now at hand when Faber was to give up all hope of remaining in the Anglican Church; and, during the last week of October, 1845, he again wrote to Bishop Waring asking for enlightenment on certain points, and was only held back by his consideration of others and some monetary difficulties in connection with his parish. By the generosity of a friend, the latter obstacle was removed, in spite of the benefactor’s disapproval of conversions.

On Nov. 12th, the Rector was called

FATHER FABER

at night to give Communion to a dying man, and in a flash he felt that he was no true priest ; and it was only after some consideration that he was guided by St. Alphonsus to act on what he called a probable opinion.

On Sunday, Nov. 16th, at the evening service the final wrench came. After a few words by way of introduction, he said that he could no longer teach his hearers the doctrines of the Church of England, and that he felt convinced that he must go where truth was to be found. At the close of these few words he left the pulpit hurriedly, threw his surplice on to the ground and went at once into the Rectory.

Some of his parishioners begged him to remain, but, finding their appeal of no avail, bade him a sorrowful farewell. The next morning he left Elton, Mr. T. F. Knox, two servants and about half a dozen of his parishioners, who had also decided to be received into the Church with him, going too. Among the

FATHER FABER

number was Mr. William Pitts, who afterwards became organist of the London Oratory. Writing to him from Rouen in February, 1846, Faber says :

“ What does Elton seem as we look back upon it ? Those gettings up at the cold midnight, the teasing hair girdles on Wednesdays and Fridays, the harsh discipline at midnight, the long, long vigil of the Saints’ days, what do you think of them now ? To me they seem like heaven, although we were not yet Catholics.”

“ God bless you, Mr. Faber wherever you go ” was the cry from the poor as the party passed through the village in the early morning.

“ Free ! the joyous light of Heaven
Comes with full and fair release.”

Faber and his friends were received that night by Bishop Waring and Father Kennedy at the church at Northampton, and there made their First Communion and were confirmed.

FATHER FABER

Monsignor Wiseman, then at Oscott, was deeply interested in the welfare of the Converts, and they felt an attraction to be near him. Faber, therefore, being as he said, "homeless and unsettled," gladly accepted an invitation to stay at St. Chad's in Birmingham until his affairs were settled. His humility led him to refuse the offer made by the Bishop to admit him to Priest's Orders and start him at work. He lost no opportunity, however, of trying to convert any Anglican friends who consulted him. Dr. Wiseman decided it would be a good thing if he and his little party could be formed into a small Community, and, just as St. Philip worked as a layman, so did Faber. He writes : " I hope by the end of next week to get all my dear monks around me in a little hovel here ; how we are to be supported I do not know ; mutual love is next door to vic-tuals and drink, and it is some comfort to me that I shall be simply on a level with them, and live like a poor man."

FATHER FABER

The house they obtained was a very small one, at 77 Charlotte Street, and contained scarcely any furniture, the chapel, an upstairs room, was absolutely bare—no altar, only a crucifix on the wall. The dormitories had no bedsteads, the mattresses resting on the floor. The refectory was the best furnished, and that contained a chair for each one, and a long deal table, some knives, forks and pewter spoons (stamped with the temperance pledge) and a mug apiece. On the round table stood a crucifix brought by Faber from Elton.

From this it can be seen that the view of life was an ascetic one, but the community was joyful. The strain, however, soon told on the Superior, and brought on headaches which prostrated him.

They could not go on without external help ; and Faber decided to go to Rome in the hopes of getting someone to be interested in the little community. The difficulty was how to get there, and

FATHER FABER

what was to become of his little family during his absence. A gift from a friend settled the first trouble, and Father Moore promised to take charge of the community, the lay-brothers obtaining employment in the town during the day and returning to the house at night.

V

Things being so arranged, Faber started for Italy at the beginning of February, 1846, accompanied by Mr. Hutchison, a convert who afterwards joined the Oratory. The Archbishop of Lyons had issued a pastoral directing that thanksgiving should be made for the conversions which had given the Newmans, the Oakleys, and the Fabers to the Church. This caused the two neophytes great amusement to read. Reaching Rome just before Holy Week they put up at the English College, Father Grant having generously offered them hospitality, and they made their first Easter Communion in the Holy City. Mr. Hutchison now asked to be taken into the new Community. His adherence would have been of great help, but Faber would not let him so early commit himself. Dr. Grant however urged him to accept the offer, and finally Mr. Hutchison's proposal was accepted, and it was decided he should join on their return to England. On

FATHER FABER

returning, Faber intended to ask Newman to receive him and his followers at Maryvale when he was there, and also to ask the Bishop to direct his studies that he might be fitted for the priesthood.

The Protestant Bishop of Gibraltar was in Rome at this time for confirmation, and a great dispute arose among the High and Low Church Party whether he should have a cross carried before him. Certain Romans were much annoyed, but the Pope "chuckled hugely," and said that he had only just found out that Rome was in the diocese of Gibraltar!! His Holiness received Faber and Hutchison very graciously, and at the end of the interview gave them his blessing, and told them to go back to England and convert as many of their friends as they might. Just at this time some copies of his pamphlet, "Grounds for remaining in the Anglican Communion," reached Rome; and the authorities, naturally deceived by the title, suppressed them; a mistake that was soon set right.

VI

The return to Birmingham was made on May 10th, 1846. Faber brought with him some books of devotion unknown in England, at any rate not in use, and also introduced the Seven Dolour Rosary which, through constant use at the Oratory, has since become well known.

On the Feast of St. Philip, May 26th, 1846 (it is noteworthy how many events of Faber's life occurred on this day, when as yet there was no thought of his being an Oratorian) the Community moved to another home at Colmore Terrace, which has been obtained for them by Mr. Watts Russell. It consisted at this time of four Choir-brothers and nine Lay-brothers, all of them "Brothers of the Will of God." The rule was an austere one. The time for rising was half-past five, and at six was followed by Mass at St. Chad's, then breakfast taken standing, dry bread and tea without sugar. After breakfast there was another visit

26

FATHER FABER

to the Chapel, then work till half-past twelve. After Vespers and Compline came dinner, one of the Brothers reading some spiritual book the while ; then came recreation, when silence was broken for the first time. At five in the evening Matins and Lauds preceded tea and recreation, instruction in chapel, Rosary of the Seven Dolours and night prayers. The habit worn by the "Wilfridians," as they were called, was the black Roman cassock with the letters V.D. and a cross between, all in red cloth, a cape, a leather girdle and a Rosary.

At the back of the house was a large garden, and the Brothers used to invite the poor Catholic boys of the neighbourhood to come and play there in the evening. The day always closed with the Litany of Our Lady, sung in procession, and a candle continually lit before her picture at the Angelus hour.

The converts at this time had a great many difficulties to contend with from the Protestants around them. Some of

FATHER FABER

the Catholics also regarded with suspicion the idea of " Oxford Protestants " having real Catholic sympathies. They regarded them as only " half " Catholic, opposed as " new-fangled " all their attempts to popularise the devotion they had seen in Rome, and in many other ways showed their dislike to any idea of what might be called " coming out of the shell " in which, for two hundred years, the Catholics of England had to hide. Wiseman saw this, and knew that the only way to make things smoother would be to get the stamp of authority placed on their work. He decided, therefore, that Newman and his own intimate companions should go to Rome and there remain for a time. This they did, and took up their abode at the College of Propaganda.

Meanwhile the Wilfridians suffered similar annoyances. Although the work set them to do went on steadily, mistrust of their behaviour resulting almost daily in the visit of strange priests who

28

An Hymn.

Mother of Mercy! day by day
Thy arm of love grows more and more;
Thy gifts are strewn upon my way
Like sands upon the great sea shore.

Though poverty and work and woe
The masters of my life may be,
When times are worst, who does not know
Darkness is light with love of Thee

But scornful men have coldly said
Thy love was leading me from God
And yet in this I did but tread
The very path my Saviour trod.

They know but little of Thy worth
! No speak these heartless words to me;
For what did Jesus live on earth
One half so tenderly as Thee?

Get me the grace to love Thee more;
Jesus will give if Thou wilt plead;
And, Mother! when life's cares are o'er
O I shall love Thee then indeed!

Jesus when his three hours were run,
Bequeathed Thee from the Cross to me;
And O! how can I love Thy Son,
Sweet Mother! if I love not Thee?

FATHER FABER

treated them with a sort of reserve, questioning them on their rule and their plans. A layman and so recent a convert, Faber naturally felt he would rather withdraw from the public view and live quietly in retirement with his Brothers. But Dr. Wiseman would not have it so. While some talked of Faber's "Mariolatry," others said of him, who had learned to love Our Lady with such child-like and St. Philip-like simplicity, that he had not "warmed to Mary." His verse, if nothing else, is his justification in both particulars. At this time about the only hymn to Our Lady in English was the time honoured "Hail Queen of Heaven"; in the collection of Faber's hymns published by Richardson in 1832 there are twenty-two.

"And, Oh, how can I love Thy Son
Sweet Mother, if I love not Thee?"

In July, 1846, Lord Shrewsbury offered Faber a piece of land next the church at Cheadle, together with Cotton Hall as a sort of Rest House for the Community.

FATHER FABER

Bishop Walsh urged his acceptance of this noble gift, as he was afraid that the Brothers would break down if too soon put into the work of the diocese, while, on the other hand, the Birmingham clergy were unwilling to lose such willing helpers.

The church of St. Giles at Cheadle, also the gift of "the good Lord Shrewsbury," was solemnly dedicated on September 1st. Faber—now "Brother Wilfrid"—and two or three of the others were asked to stay at Alton Towers for the ceremony; and now they removed to Cotton Hall and kept their first Feast of the Holy Name of Mary in their new home.

On St. Wilfrid's Day Faber received Minor Orders from Bishop Walsh and afterwards was laid the first stone of St. Wilfrid's church, of which Pugin (himself its architect) said: "It will be the only perfect church in England, with an east window I could die for."

Father Cobb gave a ten days' Retreat

FATHER FABER

to the Brothers, who were to receive Orders ; but the long silence and hours of solitary meditation enjoined proved too much for Brother Wilfrid himself, exhausted as he was by long months of anxiety. He had a nervous fever, and, on All Saints Day, the sacrament of Extreme Unction was administered. He made his Profession of Faith, bade farewell to the Community and received the last blessing and Papal Indulgence, the Brothers, like St. Philip's sons, kneeling round his bed praying for their Father's life. It pleased God to spare him, and in a short time he was able to resume with enthusiasm the work that came to his hand.

A school for boys was opened, and, on Sundays, Catechism classes were held in the Chapel. Again evil thoughts and tongues were at work, as in St. Philip's time. " I am said to have strangled one of my monks." " Mrs. R. came to see me at St. Wilfrid's, and glared at me in silence like a tigress. She told Lady Shrewsbury and Lady Arundell that I

FATHER FABER

was just capable of all she heard, and that her faith in it was established." He wrote to his old college friend, Mr. Watts Russell : " And a Scotchman who had come to inspect said of me that I was 'an ambitious villain and a hellish ruler.'"

On the 19th of December, 1846, he received the Order of sub-deacon ; on the Saturday before Passion Sunday, 1847, he was made deacon, and was ordained Priest on the Holy Saturday following, at once receiving the sole charge of the Mission. On his return he began work in the confessional, and he said his first Mass that Easter Sunday. His preaching at once began, as at Elton, to draw large congregations. The Parish Church emptied. " We have converted the pew-opener, leaving the parson only, his clerk, and two drunken men, as his regular communicants." One of his brothers in St. Philip, who remembers him, speaking of his preaching says : " He used but little gesture, satisfied

FATHER FABER

with inflections of a voice which was most beautiful, clear and musical and in its silver tone like the voice of Pius IX."

Father Faber used to preach in his habit, and always wore his crucifix, even while preaching in the street. This, of course, met with great opposition. He used to tell how, on one occasion, a minister forced his way into a sick room when he was about to hear a man's confession, and refused to leave, until the penitent implored him repeatedly to do so. He, however, wished even then to enter into an argument on points of doctrine, and challenged Father Faber to a formal discussion, insisting on using the English version of the Bible only. Father Faber decided that, to prevent any question as to the translation, it would be best to use the original Greek! This the combatant was not prepared for; and, after some insulting remarks retired from the discussion. Several conversions followed the controversy.

FATHER FABER

Next he gave a mission in the potteries near Wolverhampton, "where I may have a chance of martyrdom," he wrote to Watts Russell.

VII

The idea of founding an Oratory in England was suggested to the Holy Father in February, 1847. He was delighted at the idea, and at once gave Newman and his companions in Rome a house and an Oratorian Father to instruct them in the rule, suggesting that they should serve a short novitiate and then all return home together at the end of the year. Wiseman went to Rome in July, and had an interview with Newman respecting the scheme. They were now settled at Santa Croce as novices. Newman was appointed by the Pope as the first Superior, and Bishop Wiseman, who was now Administrator of the London District, was desirous that the Oratory should be started in London and invited Newman to make his foundation here. Birmingham, however, was named in the Papal brief, and to Birmingham he went, taking a house in Alcester Street.

At once on Father Newman's return,

FATHER FABER

Faber again offered himself and his Community to him as novices. The offer, however, was not made without a great struggle. "Elton was to come over again; the will of God was to hunt me out of my new home, to snap all ties."

Father Faber and Father Hutchison were called to London by Bishop Wiseman to consider their position. They arrived just after Father Stanton, the first Oratorian to land in England, who was wearing his habit. Faber talked over his idea of joining the Oratory with the Bishop, who solemnly approved, and pronounced that it was to be so. This, of course, entailed his giving up the position of Superior, which he had held since the foundation of the Community, and becoming a novice. It also meant the giving up of St. Wilfrid's, which he describes as "uprooting one altogether from the earth." Speaking of going to Maryvale, he says: "So away goes home, church, flock, Eltonian children and all. . . . Certainly the

FATHER FABER

Oratory has been a bloody husband to me, but I trust that it will also bring with it a fresh covenant of grace." His spirits had returned by the time he wrote of himself and his fellows, "all in our Philippine habits, with turn-down collars, like so many good boys."

In July, 1848, Bishop Wiseman assisted at the opening of St. George's Cathedral and there were present the Oratorians as well as 240 other priests, Regulars and Seculars, and fourteen Bishops. In the procession were also Benedictines, Cistercians, Dominicans, Franciscans and Passionists. The sermon was preached by Wiseman, Monsignor Stonor was an acolyte.

We, in these days, can hardly realise the difficulties the "new blood" had to contend with from some of the Catholics. They objected to the bringing back of images to the churches, new devotions were looked upon as Romanising, extra devotions to the Blessed Virgin and Blessed Sacrament were innovations and

FATHER FABER

novelties, and were opposed. At that time there existed but one statue of Our Blessed Lady in London. Faber's Life of St. Philip, like other lives in the Oratorian series, was severely criticised. To all, was added the outburst of Protestant indignation at the restoration of the Hierarchy and the appointment of Cardinal Wiseman as Archbishop of Westminster. The *Times* printed a leader full of such phrases as "Roman bondage, daring assumption of power, acts which the laws of this country will never recognise."

The converts who had joined the Oratory had now increased to such numbers that it was decided to open a house in London, and it was eventually settled that Father Newman should remain in Birmingham and Father Faber be Rector of the London house. The first Mass in the London Oratory he said on the feast of the Patronage of St. Joseph in 1849. The chapel consisted of a large room at the back of Nos. 24 and 25



The First London Oratory, King William Street, 1849-1853

FATHER FABER

King William Street, Strand ; the altar, which was for about forty years in use at the Little Oratory and is now in S. Philip's Church, Sydenham, had been procured from the old Portuguese Chapel. The day appointed for the opening was May 31st, and as, a month earlier, there was practically no furniture for the chapel, the amount of work to be got through may be easily imagined. In fact, chaos appeared to reign on May 30th, porters hurrying here and there with benches and chairs ; organ-builders and tuners hard at work, with organ pipes all round them, the altar being fitted up by some of the Fathers. But, by the time appointed, next day, all was ready. Bishop Wiseman pontificated and preached, also assisting at Vespers, when Father Newman preached. The Community then consisted of Fathers Faber, Dalgairns, Stanton (who as already stated was the first Oratorian to land in England) Hutchison, Knox and Alban Wells. With these were two

FATHER FABER

novices, Father Gordon, who was afterwards Superior for many years, and Father John Bowden, to whose Life of Faber the present writer is indebted for most of the facts here set forth. Soon after, there came among them, to complete his education, a youth who had lived with them at Maryvale, Charles Henry Bowden, who never left them, becoming a priest, well beloved of the poor and destitute, and well remembered by all frequenters of the Oratory for his fine voice and his happy countenance. Bishop Wiseman, who was a brother of the little Oratory in Rome, was delighted to have his scheme brought to fulfilment, and the Fathers always found in him a kind friend and protector. That they were the first Religious Community to serve a church in London was again a cause of grievance to some of the more old-fashioned among the Secular clergy. The Oratorians from the first wore the habit publicly, and this too was looked upon with suspicion, as

FATHER FABER

also were the devotions, which were called methodistical. Yet the evening services soon became a favourite form of devotion ; good numbers attended them, and shortly other priests used Faber's hymns, which had mostly been set to music by Father Wells.

VIII

St. Philip had come to England, and was doing his work as he had done it in Rome. Converts were “pouring pell-mell into the church.” Men of nearly all professions and of none came to the Oratory for instruction ; doctors, lawyers and soldiers were being received weekly ; the Communions reached five hundred a week, which, for a London church so lately established, was a very large number in those days.

With September came a call for priests to go to the hop-fields to help the poor sufferers from the cholera, and at once Father Faber and two of his Fathers went to Farleigh, where Henry Wilberforce, the Rector, was to be the witness of a charity that brought him and his family into the Church.

On October the 9th, 1850, the Oratory in London was made independent of Birmingham, this being St. Philip’s



A Ragged Congregation at the schools in Dunn's
Passage, Holborn
(From a water colour drawing)

FATHER FABER

rule, and on St. Wilfrid's Day, Father Faber was elected its Provost.

When, owing to the re-establishment of the Hierarchy in England, the greatest agitation prevailed, disputes arose upon various subjects, among them the zeal displayed by the new Cardinal Wiseman, which was called by the old-fashioned party "love of power." The Cardinal felt that the Religious Orders in a country like ours, ought to take an active part in the missionary work. This, they pleaded was not allowed by their rule, and on October 27th, 1852, he wrote to Father Faber stating the case and almost appealed for help. Faber at once offered the services of his church and Fathers for missionary work, an offer at first declined. However, Father Faber applied to Rome for such dispensations of the rule as would permit of this plan. The Cardinal was deeply grateful for this, and, about a year later, the London Oratory undertook the regular mission which has been carried on ever since. On St.

FATHER FABER

Philip's Day, 1856, Wiseman preached in the London Oratory a panegyric of the Saint, in which he compared the work of St. Philip at Chiesa Nuova with that at Brompton.

In 1851 Father Faber and Father Hutchison opened a school for poor boys and girls in Rose Street, Covent Garden, which a few months afterwards, was moved to Dunn's Passage, Holborn. More than one thousand children attended these schools, before they were moved later to Charles Street, Drury Lane, where, in spite of the great distance from Brompton, and increased work occasioned by the mission work, they were maintained by the Fathers till 1863, when they were made over to the diocese.

In the winter of 1851, Father Faber's health again broke down. He was ordered to travel and, in Rome once more, he obtained an audience of Pius IX., and then obtained the daily Plenary Indulgence for the Church of the Oratory.



The Old Oratory at Brompton

FATHER FABER

In June, 1852, came the proclamation forbidding Catholic priests to wear the habit of their Order, and the Fathers therefore discontinued the practice. During the next month, St. Mary's, Sydenham, a house of rest for the community, was finished, and on August 2nd, the Blessed Sacrament was reserved there for the first time, and on the 10th a visit was paid by Prince Massimi of the family mentioned in the Life of our Holy Father St. Philip in connection with the miracle worked on Paolo de Massimi.

In the March of 1853, work was begun for the building of the Oratory on the site of the present one and completed within the year. Meantime, the work was going on at King William Street and Dunn's Passage, the people being called together by the ringing of a hand bell and gathered into "Rosary rooms" which had been hired in the lowest slums of Drury Lane, where instructions were given, hymns sung and the Rosary said. The indifference of the people once

FATHER FABER

wrung from Father Faber the following speech. Falling on his knees in the pulpit he cried : “ How can I touch your hearts ? I have prayed to Jesus ; I have prayed to Mary ; whom shall I pray to next ? I will pray to *you*, my dear Irish children, to have mercy on your own souls.” The effect was truly wonderful, the whole congregation knelt and for a time no sound could be heard but their sobs and prayers.

He was very like St. Philip in others of his sayings. One of the Fathers remarking the neatness of his room, he replied, “ You know, my son, the napkin was folded in the sepulchre.” Again someone remarked the talent displayed in getting through so much literary work. “ Talent,” he said “ Nonsense, my son, it is the fear of God.”

One can well imagine the sort of tale St. Philip would have told young Paolo de Massimi had he asked him for a fairy tale ; in response to a similar request from the daughter of a noble

FATHER FABER

English house Faber wrote "Ethel's Tales of the Angels.*"

The life led at Brompton was as busy as it had been at King William Street, and modelled so closely on the lines of St. Philip, that one has only to alter names, and the account of St. Philip's day at the Chiesa Nuova would read like a day with "The Father at the London Oratory": early Mass in private chapel, work at one or other of his books till breakfast, visits from the Fathers for advice on the day's work in their several departments, sermons, correspondence, which was enormous, and the thousand and one things which fall to the Superior of a Religious Community, who for years fulfilled also the office of Novice Master, and all this in spite of repeated attacks of most painful illness. In five years alone he wrote the following among his famous books: "All for Jesus," "Growth in Holiness," "The Blessed Sacrament," "The Creator and the

* London: Burns & Oates.

FATHER FABER

Creature," "The Foot of the Cross," "Bethlehem," "Spiritual Conferences," "Poems and Hymns," and a part of "The Precious Blood," and a second volume of "Spiritual Exercises."

One of his favourite recreations was to see the children at St. Wilfrid's Convent whom he called his "grandchildren," and to whom his visits were always a source of joy—remembered now by some who still talk of him with full hearts, as a saint.

Father Faber would allow of nothing but the best for the service of the Altar, and the decorum observed by even the small boys who sometimes assist at Benediction is remarked even to this day.

It was not till the year 1861 that the Father's work was seriously interfered with by his long and complicated illness. He preached sermons on All Souls Day and on the Feast of St. Charles at Bayswater; and, shortly after, had a severe attack of bronchitis and inflammation of the lungs. For a time

FATHER FABER

great anxiety was felt, for his heart also was affected. By the 8th of December, however, he had returned from Arundel where he had been recruiting. The Fathers prevailed upon him to refrain from some of his labours, and he spent most of the summer at St. Mary's, Sydenham, where he had frequent attacks. He used to say that pain was a precious gift of God.

X

During the Lent of 1863 Father Faber decided to preach on the Sundays, and actually did so on the first four ; but illness prevented him completing the course. His last sermon was preached on Passion Sunday, and in a very few days it was found necessary to call in special medical advice, as his illness was assuming a much more serious aspect, and he himself declared : “ I do not see how I can recover now.”

The community, however, were still hopeful, and could not bring themselves to realise that they were soon to lose their Father. At this time they consisted of twenty-seven members, of whom all save four had been guided by him to S. Philip's House. When the news of his serious condition got abroad, letters of inquiry and condolence came from all quarters, and prayers, Masses and Novenas were everywhere offered for him. He said his own last Mass on the



The New London Oratory

FATHER FABER

anniversary of the foundation of the first London Oratory, the Feast of the Patronage of St. Joseph.

He grew rapidly worse, and on June the 16th, the Holy Viaticum was carried to him in solemn procession. Extreme Unction was afterwards administered. To the questions put he answered clearly and firmly, even adding a few words to them. To the question, Do you for God's sake forgive your enemies? "Yes, I do; I never had any." Again: "Do you now from your heart ask pardon of every one, &c.?" he answered: "I do, especially of every member of the Community: I have been proud, uncharitable, unobservant, and I ask pardon of all. I wish I had been more kind." Although there were no hopes of his recovery, he lingered on for some weeks, and was able to receive Cardinal Wiseman, his old and faithful friend. His sufferings were now very great and it sometimes happened he could not find words to express his meaning, although his mind was

FATHER FABER

perfectly clear, so great was the pain he endured. A visit from Father Newman towards the end of July cheered him considerably.

Matters remained much the same, with occasional signs of improvement, till September, when he had grown terribly weak and had some delirium. On the 15th a change appeared; he was in bed, and his eyes fixed on a large crucifix at the foot of the bed. He was told that the end was near, and he replied most fervently, "God be praised!" At midnight the Community was assembled, and the commendation of his soul was made. He seemed to get a little better and the Fathers went back to their rooms. At half-past six the next morning Father Rowe came into his room and told him he was just going to say Mass for him. He looked his thanks, being unable to speak; and, just as the Mass was finished, he turned slightly and, with a clear bright look, gave his soul back to its Creator.

FATHER FABER

Almost his last words were, "If ever I am able to obtain it for you, I will pray that all of you may have *easy deaths*."

This was fifty years ago, "I have lived," says the Father who has been *infirmarian* for most of the time, "to see the prayer answered."

The body was placed in the Little Oratory that the people might make their last visit; and crowds came and went, bringing their Rosaries to be placed on the coffin. On the Tuesday following the body was taken in solemn procession into the church, the Fathers chanting the *Miserere*. Vespers of the Dead were sung, and, next day, came the Requiem. The church was thronged, there being more than a hundred priests and members of the Religious Communities. Father Newman and Father St. John came from Birmingham. The Mass was sung by Father Richard Stanton; and after the Absolutions the well-beloved Father was taken to the burial place of St. Mary's, Sydenham,

FATHER FABER

whither, only two months before, his great friend and follower, Father Anthony Hutchison had preceded him.

Large numbers followed on foot and saw the body of the man who had been to many of them the guide into the ways of peace, and to the fold of Peter, laid at the foot of the consecration Cross. Here lies his dust, waiting till the final call shall unite it to the soul, which we trust is before the throne of God, not far from the feet of his "Dear and Blessed Lady" whom he so dearly loved on earth.

Beati mortui qui in Domino moriuntur.



Father Faber's Grave
In the Cemetery of the Oratorians at Sydenham

FATHER FABER'S GRAVE

By Father K. D. BEST.

(OBIIT. XXVI. SEPT., MDCCCLXIII.

Vixit Annos XLIX. In Congr. XV.

Thousands who mourned at Faber's death
Ask for his resting place ;
Even poor strangers to the faith
Come, as if drawn by grace.

Where is he buried ? We are come
Not to the Poet or Sage,
But to the Priest of God whose tomb
Merits our pilgrimage.

Where is he buried ? He who wrote
Hymns that he might have heard
Chanted in heaven, whose echoed note
Sounds in each holy word.

Where is he buried ? He so true,
True to his God and creed,
True to the ' treasure old and new,'
True to the Church in need.

FATHER FABER

Where is he buried ? Have ye made
Room for your noble dead
Here, in the church where he preached
and prayed,
Here, where his Mass was said ?

Under that altar he should be,
Faithful and watchful found—
Sailors are buried near their sea,
Soldiers on battle ground.

Where is he buried ? Thus they ask
Eagerly day by day.
Piety shrinks not from its task,
Well does love know the way . . .

Here is he buried ! look around,
All is just as he planned—
Garden, lawns, and Burial Ground,
Drawn by his own dear hand.

Here is he buried ! see the trees—
Then, only nursling plants,
Now, they make dirges in the breeze
During the robin's chants.

FATHER FABER

Here is he buried ! skylarks sing
Up in the clear blue sky,
Ere they descend on loving wing
Down to the nest hard by.

Here is he buried ! cypress trees,
Roses in endless bloom,
Lead the heart's faithful memories
Back to Christ's garden tomb.

Forty-nine years from birth till death,
Death in the Autumn days,
Fifteen with Philip—the grave-stone saith ;
No other word of praise.

Here is he buried ! others too
Sleep here—God's will be done !
Some of the graves are green, some new—
Ranged round this central one.

Hark to yon City's ceaseless roar,
Reaching these quiet graves !
Life calls death—But the silent shore
Heeds not the senseless waves.

FATHER FABER

There they fulfilled their priestly life,
There bravely fought the fight,
Finding here, after toil and strife,
Rest and the longed-for night.

Asking assistance to be brave,
Help to endure each loss,
Often we come to our Father's grave
Close to the holy Cross.

Sweet is it ever to see that Sign
Shedding by day and night
Beautiful blessings, peace divine,
Shadows more loved than light.

'Tis not the De Profundis Bell,
'Tis not the Requiem Mass,
But it is Heaven's sacred spell
Laid on the dewy grass.

Here is he buried ! see the mound,
Lowly yet ever blest ;
Thus, in St. Mary's holy ground,
Father and Brethren rest.



W9-DFD-816

